

# Consumer Council News

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## SAMHSA- National Survey on Drug Use and Health

In 2003 25 million veterans (93% male) were living in the United States. The survey found an estimated 56.6% of veterans used alcohol in the past month compared with 50.8% of comparable nonveterans. An estimated 13.2% of veterans reported driving while under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year compared with 12.2% of comparable nonveterans. An estimated 18.8 % of veterans reported smoking versus 14.3% non veterans.

Newsletter sponsored by  
VA Mental Health  
Consumer Council  
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## No Overall Review of PTSD Cases

Secretary Nicholson stated the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will not review the files of 72,000 veterans currently receiving disability compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder.

The VA's Inspector General office reported in May, 2005 that a sample of 2,100 randomly selected veterans with disability ratings for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) had insufficient documentation in the files.

They also stated that veterans filing for PTSD disability compensation had increased dramatically since 1999.

Secretary Nicholson stated after careful review of the 2,100 cases cited that the problems with the files appear to be administrative in nature, such as missing documents and not fraud.

"In the absence of evidence of fraud, we're not going to put our veterans through anxiety of a widespread review of their disability claims," Secretary Nicholson said.

"Instead we are going to improve our training for VA personnel who handle disability claims and administrative oversight." This was a welcome relief to many veterans who were concerned that they would have benefits they have been awarded reviewed. The system needs to be better standardized in the review process since there are variances across the country. This issue remains an important priority and will be reviewed for the future on how the process can be improved.



## VHA Eight for Excellence Mission

VHA recently described the eight guiding strategies that will ensure that VHA continues to provide health care that is **safe, effective, efficient** and **compassionate** every day to every veteran.

The eight for Excellence Strategies are:

**Improve health**-Promote health within VA, local communities and the nation that is consistent with VA's mission

**Education & Training**-Promote excellence in the education of future health care professionals and enhance VHA partnerships with affiliates.

**Research & Development**-Focus research and development on clinical and system improvements designed to enhance the health and well-being of veterans

**Business practices**-Promote excellence in business practices through administrative, financial and clinical efficiencies.

**Diversity**-Promote diversity, excellence, and satisfaction in the workforce and foster a culture which encourages innovation

**Exceptional service**-Continuously improve veterans and families satisfaction with VA care by promoting patient centered care and excellent customer service.

**Access to care**-Provide timely and appropriate access to health care by implementing best practices.

**Quality & Safety**-Continuously improve the quality and safety of health care for veterans.

Online Newsletter  
[www.mentalhealth.med.va.gov/cc](http://www.mentalhealth.med.va.gov/cc)

## Online Medication Refill Service

VA's MyHealtheVet prescription refill service is proving to be extremely successful in providing veterans with fast, easy and secure access to their important medications. The secure online prescription refill service has quickly emerged as one of the most popular features in the MYHealtheVet system, which connects with VA's widely electronic records system.

When a veteran orders a prescription refill, the request is routed to VA's computer to be filled by one of the department's outpatient mail pharmacies. The refill is sent directly to the veteran, eliminating the need to for a trip to the pharmacy.

More than 70,000 prescriptions have been refilled using the latest service added to the online health record system designed for the veteran's health care system. There were 100,000 veterans signed up to use MyHealtheVet since October 2005 located on VA's Web site at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).

Among the services available to veterans, their fami-

lies and VA care providers the online personal records have the ability to track health conditions such as entering blood pressure and cholesterol levels-and to record medications, allergies, military health history, medical events and tests.

Veterans can also include personal information, such as emergency contacts, medical providers and health insurance information. They can access health information on the internet from VA, MedlinePlus from the national Library of Medicine, and Healthwise, a commercial health education library.

Future expansion of MyHealtheVet will allow VA patients to view appointments, see payment balances, access portions of their medical records and give access to records for doctors, family members and others.

These advances have greatly improved service to veterans and is leading the way in health care nationally.

## Advantages of Care Coordination & Telehealth to Veterans

Care coordination and telehealth provide patient-centered care for veterans and support to their caregivers. Information technology can ensure that all data related to a patient's conditions are current and available to medical providers exactly when needed. Timely access to health information improves care and reduces the risk of medical errors.

As impressive as the technology is, the key to telehealth success is the way it helps in coordinating patient care. Successful home telehealth programs that match a patient's needs to technology that the caregiver or patient can manage also reduce clinic visits. As a veteran ages, the need for services is frequently determined by expert advice on appropriate treatment of chronic conditions. Having this advice available in the home is convenient and can expedite or defer hospital admission.

Telehealth makes it possible to exchange routine clinical data and visual assessments among medical facilities locally, regionally and nationally. There are parts of the country where distance and weather are barriers to care. Telehealth brings care to the patient and avoids the cost and inconvenience of travel. Telepharmacy, one telehealth application, helps make medications available to veterans in VA community clinics. Telehealth permits a northern "snowbird" veteran receiving care at home through telehealth to continue a care regimen in Florida in the winter. Because telehealth moves information, rather than people, it can be more efficient and less expensive than traditional care and provide expert advice when a patient needs it. Improving access to care, and permitting more frequent monitoring of patients and their health status are resulting in high-quality care and satisfaction among veterans.

## Information and Resources

VA Caregiver Conference  
January 25-27, 2006  
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